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INFO RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
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STATE FOR SCA/FO (DAS GASTRIGHT), SCA/A  
STATEPASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/CDHA/DG  
NSC FOR HARRIMAN  
OSD FOR KIMMITT  
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT/CHAGHCHARAN: FOOD SHORTAGE IN WESTERN  
AFGHANISTAN

11. SUMMARY: (U) World Food Program (WFP) and Afghan government officials alike recognize the current vulnerability to food shortages faced particularly ) though not exclusively ) by Afghanistan's western provinces. The onset of winter is now exacerbating the effects of the lengthy drought. Badghis and Ghor provinces appear to be the worst off, with Ghor facing the potential of months-long isolation because of blocked mountain passes. WFP is speeding food aid to the area and is optimistic that it can meet its targets for sufficient food assistance to the western provinces. WFP says the real challenge is in the February-April time frame, when local food stocks are likely to run low. This underscores the need for a more robust response to WFP's extended drought appeal. END SUMMARY

#### Epicenter of the Food Shortage

12. (U) WFP officials in Kabul and Deputy Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) Rahimi have confirmed what embassy PRT officers have been reporting: the four western provinces of Herat, Badghis, Ghor and Farah are increasingly vulnerable to food shortages. The long drought, which one can only hope might now be easing, has exacerbated these provinces, chronic food insecurity. Badghis and Ghor, the latter seen by many as the epicenter of the food shortage, face an especially serious situation, given the difficulty of getting food into the two provinces during the winter. At a meeting with Poloff and U.S. PRT rep, Ghor province's six members of the National Assembly, s Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) claimed some Ghor residents were preparing to leave in the face of the potential food shortage. World Food Program to the Rescue

13. (U) For its part, WFP officials in Kabul are optimistic about dealing with the major food needs in these vulnerable areas at least until spring, when the snow melts and the passes reopen. This upbeat view, however, presupposes there are no further delays caused by security issues or customs officials stopping trucks for &technical8 reasons, as happened recently at the border post of Torkam between Peshawar and Jalalabad. Resolving that incident required direct intervention by MRRD with the Ministry of Finance.

14. (U) WFP is giving high priority to Ghor and Badghis. WFP

reports it has already delivered approximately 4,000 mts to the two provinces, and another 3,000 mts is reportedly arriving at a forward support base in Herat and will be moved on immediately to Ghor and Badghis. Another 7,500 mts is also planned for delivery to the two provinces. These deliveries will help carry them through to the end of this year. Additionally, the Spanish PRT in Badghis Province has made a cash contribution intended to support a further 650 mts in WFP deliveries. In total, about 15,000 mts have made or are making their way to the two provinces. Included in that total is about USD 50,000 in WFP distributed food for Ghor being provided as part of a Lithuanian-financed food-for-work school construction project launched in October.

¶5. (U) WFP says it has the logistical resources to move 500 mts per day into Ghor and Badghis and is committed to continuing to do so until snow prevents access. WFP also reports it has reached an informal understanding with the ISAF/Herat forward base for the airlifting of food to Ghor and Badghis, though only in the range of 50)100 mts, and only if a true emergency develops.

#### Kabul Reacts

¶6. (U) The central government understands the area's vulnerability and is making an effort to respond. Naseer Popal, emergency response advisor to MRRD Minister Zia, visited Ghor,s capital of Chaghcharan to assess the situation. He indicated to PRT reps on 11/18 that he has arranged for five additional vehicles to be made available to MRRD's team in Ghor and five more supervisors have been allocated to monitor and facilitate food distribution, permitting one for each of Ghor,s 10 districts. He is also looking for assistance to help keep five mountain passes open in the direction of Herat. According to Popal,s figures, in addition to 2,000 mts of WFP provided food already distributed via the Ministry of Education through local

schools, another 1,000 mts of WFP food was provided to Ghor over the last several weeks, and another 4,000 mts is in the pipeline for delivery before the end of December. World Vision's representative in Chaghcharan has confirmed the NGO will accede to MRRD's request to make one of its local warehouses available as a transit point for the food.

#### Bottom Line: Suffereing Contained?

¶7. (U) WFP maintains that even in the most vulnerable provinces, there is no evidence of impending starvation or famine. This is not to say that human suffering and some degree of deprivation are not taking and will not continue to take place, particularly in remote areas. For his part, World Vision's representative in Chaghcharan discounts claims that up to 90 percent of the province's population will be affected. He &guesstimates8 the real figure is closer to 65 percent. He too discounts the likelihood of mass starvation, noting Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and other projections based on extrapolations from this year's food production. He points as well to the remarkable toughness of the Afghan population and predicts that, with reasonable levels of assistance, most will muddle through. At this stage WFP officials see the biggest danger in the February-April period.

¶8. (U) To the extent that WFP shifts food assistance from areas of chronic food insecurity to areas hardest hit by the drought, this tends to stretch the capacity of their overall food assistance program throughout the country. Thus, WFP underscores the need for a greater response to the drought appeal. The USG has heard that appeal and already provided considerable food assistance to Afghanistan (through WFP) both as a response to chronic food insecurity (about USD 50 million in FY6) and to the drought appeal itself (about USD 18 million since July 2006). To date, responses to the drought appeal and its October extension request, however, have been quite limited from other donor countries.

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